The role of games in teaching and learning vocabulary

Tokhtaboyeva Nigora

Uzbekistan state world languages university, Tashkent, Uzbekistan

nigora.toxtaboyeva@inbox.ru

ABSTRACT

The article puts the idea of using games in a language learning classes forward as it is considered to be very beneficial among all the students regardless of their age. It creates opportunities to learn easily and to teach effectively.

Keywords: method, games, rote memory, language games, "learning to communicate", visual aids, role play, drama.

1. INTRODUCTION

While in the traditional method of teaching English, students sit still listening to teachers talking about English language and try their best to remember English words and grammatical rules by rote memory, in the communicative language teaching approach they are actively involved in playing games which in turn can arouse and maintain their interest in learning, promote their motivation of study, and at the same time get lots of opportunities to have their basic skills of listening and speaking practiced. Admittedly, there are many difficulties in using games in most English classes, but it is possible to use them as long as both teachers and students appreciate their value and function. When using games, such factors as the time, choice, preparation and management should be put into consideration, which is the guarantee of successful use of language games in class. In a word, using games in English teaching very well represents the theme of the communicative language teaching approach – "Communicating to learn" and "learning to communicate".

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

One useful strategy to encourage learning a foreign language is using language games. When using games in the classroom, it is beneficial for teachers to have a complete understanding of the definitions of games, which usually are defined as a form of play concerning rules, competition, and an element of fun. Teachers should also consider the advantages of games: the ability to capture students' attention; lower students' stress; and give students the chance for real communication. Lastly teachers need to assess how to use games appropriately in the classroom. It is important to choose an appropriate time and integrate them into the regular syllabus and curriculum. However, because of the limitations of the syllabus, games often cannot be used, as much as they should be. Therefore, it may be challenging for teachers to try to add some games in class in order to develop students' English proficiency of the target language.

Some teachers think that language games are a waste of time and prefer not to use them in classroom since games sometimes have been considered only for its one element that is fun. In fact, games can provide English as a foreign language and English as second language students more than that. Among several strategies used to improve students' proficiency such as visual aids, Computer Assisted Language Learning, drama, role-play, and so on, games are another useful strategy to promote students' language proficiency (Barber, 1968). This paper aims to give a clear understanding of what games are and why and how games are used in the classroom.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The main reason why games are considered effective learning aids is that "they spur motivation and students get very absorbed in the competitive aspects of the games; moreover, they try harder at games than in other courses" (Antal, 1963). Naturally when playing games, students are trying to win or to beat

other teams for themselves or on the behalf of their team. They are so competitive while playing because they want to have a turn to play, to score points and to win. In the class, students will definitely participate in the activities. Therefore, it is possible for a teacher to introduce students to new ideas, grammar, and knowledge and so on. As in the dictation game, students are so competitive that they want to finish first and win. It can be clearly seen that games can capture students' attention and participation. They can motivate students to want to learn more. Moreover, they can transform a boring class into a challenging one.

Next, students learn without realizing that they are learning (Antal, 1963.) For instance, when playing a game called "What Would You Do If?" students will have to pick one hypothetical question from those that they have written in a box. They might get a question like "What would you do if a lion came into this classroom?" Next they have to pick one answer that they have written before. The answer they get may be "I would be a fly." Usually the question and the answer they get do not match each other, so students have to use their own imaginations to explain their bizarre answer, and everyone has fun listening to it. The explanation might be "If a lion came into this classroom, I would be a fly because I am a good person, so an angel would come and rescue me by turning me into a fly." While trying to explain, students do not worry too much about grammar mistakes because they want to communicate and to explain why it can happen. Apart from having fun, students do not worry about errors and punishment; moreover, they will learn a grammatical rule and have a chance to use it. Thus, they learn unconsciously-learn without realizing they are learning. Students stop thinking about language and begin using it in a spontaneous and natural manner within the classroom (Schweitzer, 1881.)

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion it should be pointed out that playing games in the classroom can enormously increase students' ability in using language because students have a chance to use language with a purpose in the situations provided. Hadfield (1990) confirms that "games provide as much concentrated practice as a traditional drill and more importantly, they provide an opportunity for real communication, albeit within artificially defined limits, and thus constitute a bridge between classroom and the real word." Like in a traditional classroom, students have an opportunity to drill and practice using grammatical rules and other functions.

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